

DNR VOLUNTEERS HONORED AT SCIENCE CENTER

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DES MOINES - Accustomed to slogging through rivers and pulling weeds from prairies, Iowa volunteers enjoyed the glittery new Science Center of Iowa this weekend - a change of scenery meant to honor their hard work.

The Iowa Department of Natural Resources held its fifth annual Volunteers in Natural Resources Banquet this Saturday, Nov. 12 at the Science Center. Nearly 200 volunteers and guests gathered for lunch, speeches on volunteerism, an awards ceremony and admission to many of the center's attractions.

The banquet, entitled "Honoring Our Most Valuable Resource," recognized the more than 8,000 citizens who volunteered with the DNR's Keepers of the Land Volunteer program last year.

Donating more than 212,000 hours of service, the volunteers included scout troops who refurbished state parks, couples who served as campground hosts, weekend warriors who cleaned up rivers and more.

"Thank you for making our natural resources and our environment a priority in your everyday lives," said DNR Director Jeffrey Vonk in an address to the volunteers. "It's clear that you are citizens dedicated to our natural resources and it is truly impressive."



The Keepers of the Land program handed out awards to outstanding volunteers in six categories. In addition, the DNR's citizen water quality monitoring program, IOWATER, handed out awards in four categories. Officials from both groups gave thanks and congratulations to all volunteers and award nominees.

Jane Seaton, coordinator for the community development program Main Street Iowa gave a keynote address on "The Value of a Volunteer."

The ceremony, like those volunteer efforts it honors, gives environmentally conscious citizens a chance to meet like-minded people, said volunteer John Thomas.

"I'm very interested in river travel and I know we have a pollution problem," said Thomas, who volunteered with a river cleanup this summer. "I think it's a good opportunity to hang around with people with similar interests, and a chance to do something good."

Groups and individuals from across the state took home Keepers of the Land awards:

- Kristopher Spoth, of Polk City, earned the Outstanding Youth Volunteer Award for his work leading a group of Boy Scouts in a prairie maintenance program at Big Creek State Park.
- Beth and Mark Proescholdt, of Liscomb, earned the Outstanding Individual Volunteer Award in honor of their 15 years of service researching hawks in Marshall County.
- The Lake Park and Holding Corporation of Garwin Iowa won the Outstanding Group Volunteer Award for their decades of service to Union Grove State Park, first as its founding organization in the 1940s and later as a volunteer friends group.
- Volunteers with the DNR's Retailers Consumer Education Program (RCEP) earned the Outstanding Large Project Volunteer Award for their work on a statewide survey of over 600 businesses. The group investigated whether Iowa retailers were displaying proper educational materials about household hazardous materials.
- Employees at Rock Creek State Park earned the Outstanding DNR Staff Award for their assistance to the Rock Creek Lake Alliance volunteers. Staff included Robert Steele, Roger Thompson, Mike Patterson, Bonnie Meyers, Marlon Galloway, Jeff Koplin and Chris Peck.

IOWATER handed out the following awards:

- The IOWATER Volunteer of the Year award went to Lloyd and Gaylan Crim in honor of their four years of service monitoring streams in Boone County.
- The IOWATER Professional of the Year award went to Tammy Turner, a Bremer County Conservation Board naturalist who organized the state's largest water quality sampling event.
- The IOWATER Classroom of the Year award went to Mike Skopec and his North Tama High School Advanced Biology Class, a group that investigates Wolf Creek's water quality every year.
- The IOWATER Event of the Year award went to Grant Wood Area Education Agency and their Enhancing Education through Technology initiative. In this program, teachers and students from eight school districts learned about water quality and other science topics during a student showcase at the University of Iowa this May.

All the award winners, nominees and guests heard about new opportunities and services offered by the Keepers of the Land program. Director Merry Rankin told the assembled volunteers about new short-term opportunities, an on-line events calendar and other ways to find volunteers and volunteer events.